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SERMON CLXXI.

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GROUND OF THE DIFFICULTY OF CONVERSION.

JER. ii. 25. *There is no hope : no ; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.*

THIS is the language of Israel, in a state of great worldliness and corruption. That corruption had been steadily waxing worse and worse. It had come to be characterized by great obstinacy of sin—an obstinacy that threw a deep gloom over their prospects, even in their own estimation. God had urged their repentance with intensity of interest. He had admonished ; he had afflicted ; he had tenderly invited. But amid these efforts of divine forbearance, they were unyielding ; and seemed settling down to utter despondency, in view of the inveteracy of their own corruptions. *There is no hope : no ; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.* They were aware of their guilty estrangement from God. They recognised it as voluntary. They knew that appropriate means had been employed for their repentance, and employed long, but without effect. They could recur to solemn purposes so often violated, that they had now lost all confidence in good resolutions, and anticipated only a perpetual and willing slavery to sin.

The case forcibly illustrates the general fact, that,

IT IS VERY HARD FOR MEN TO BE CONVERTED AND SAVED. Let us look at some proof of the fact, and at the ground of it. In proof of the fact, we have,

1. *The testimony of the Bible.* See it exhibited in the parable of the marriage-supper. It was the festival of a monarch. The king had sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding ; and they would not come. He sent others to press the invitation : but they still made light of it ; going their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. The same truth is exhibited in the more direct declarations of Christ : “ Ye will not come to me that ye might

have life. No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him. How can ye believe which receive honor one of another? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And when his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? Jesus said unto them, With men it is impossible; but with God all things are possible." What sentiment is more plainly revealed than the truth we are contemplating? The obvious design of Christ in such passages is to exhibit the obstinate aversion of man to the gospel scheme of mercy, and the utter hopelessness of his case except omnipotent grace interpose.

That it is very hard for men to be converted and saved is manifest,

2. *From the nature of the Gospel provisions.*

The provisions of the Gospel show that formidable difficulties still remain, even after the foundation of pardon is laid in the great atonement. The guilty and lost, in order to gain pardon and heaven, must "repent and be converted." And conversion from sin to holiness—from Satan to God—is a momentous change—a change to be achieved by no ordinary agency.

Notice the system of *means* God has put in operation looking towards this change. Why has he thrown such a flood of light upon your character, upon your relations to himself, and upon other topics connected with your immortal interests? Why brought together such mighty array of motives, if there was not something *great* to be done? something extremely *difficult* to be achieved? Who, in view of such preparations for reclaiming men, would question that God was aware of fearful opposition to be surmounted?

But he has not simply appointed this great system of *means* for the conversion of men. He has provided for the direct application of his own *omnipotence*. "That your faith might stand, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But if it be a small and *easy* matter for the degenerate to regain the divine image,—to pass from rebellion to loyalty—from Satan to God—from hell to heaven—if this involve no *difficulty*, why does omnipotence thus interpose?—why needful this special and direct application of that power which called worlds into being? Such interposition on the part of God is full of meaning. It evinces a case of mighty extremity. It presents most affecting evidence of the fact—

that it is indeed very hard for men to be converted and saved. If you deem it so easy a matter as to be the occasion of little or no anxiety, your views and those of God are very widely different.

3. The fact that men continue in sin in *decided opposition to their obvious interest*, shows the difficulty of conversion.

The interests at stake are infinite. They are well understood. And this great change is known, is admitted, to be an indispensable preparation for eternity. From infancy up to this hour, the testimony of the last Judge has thrilled your heart, and agitated your conscience;—"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." And yet, with all this knowledge, under all these sober convictions, both of duty and interest, you persist in your waywardness, you run on in the path of death, and to all appearance, are soon to leap the tremendous precipice. But if there were no difficulty in taking up the religion of Christ, would you, with thousands upon thousands, thus go down to death without God and without hope? Are you, in other matters than religion, wont to be thus reckless of personal interest and happiness? And would you thus sacrifice peace, and hope, and heaven, if not urged and borne along by an influence you find it very hard to counteract? Would you go with the multitude that tread the broad road, did it really seem to you equally pleasant and easy to enter the straight gate?

Again; that it is very hard to be converted and saved is evident,

4. *From the testimony of observation.* The world's history confirms the statement of Christ, that "wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." But why this so general wreck of immortal interests? The *fact* itself shows that in the business of conversion and salvation there is some mighty obstacle to be surmounted.

The testimony from observation is rendered more plain, by a reference to *particular cases* in the history of men. They have failed of saving conversion, often under the most favorable circumstances. Look at the Jews, who received gospel truth from the lips of its divine author; and who had visible proof that the whole was from God, in his multiplied miracles. Look at the thousands who heard, without repentance, the heavenly message, as announced by inspired apostles. Look at Agrippa and Felix, who once heard with intense interest the preaching of Paul. Look at the fields that have shared largely in visits of the quickening Spirit. Have they produced only plants of righteousness? Look at that worldling of fifty or seventy years, who learned to pray while sitting in his mother's lap, and who to the present hour has lived impenitent under all the influences of the gospel. Ob-

servation recurs at once to numerous cases like these. But men could not—would not—thus live impenitent—they would not die unholy in *such* circumstances, if conversion implied no obstacles to be surmounted.

Again; we have evidence that it is very hard for men to be converted and saved,

5. *From human experience*—the experience of both saints and sinners.

This testimony exists in different degrees of clearness in the case of different individuals. But no true Christian can probably recollect having come into the kingdom without a conflict—a conflict that seemed to hold his immortal interests in dark suspense. It was hard for him solemnly to review his life, and search his heart, and canvass his prospects for futurity. It was hard to admit the honest testimony of God as to his guilt and ruin. It was hard to listen to the rough lectures of conscience, and look at the realities revelation threw upon his eye. It was hard to admit frankly the justice of God's claims, and yield to the subduing influence of the Spirit, and sink down at the feet of his Sovereign, to be saved, if saved at all, as a matter of mere mercy from the throne. It was hard perhaps to check his enthusiasm for pleasure, or wealth, or fame. It was possibly hard to break up some endeared connections, and abandon some favorite pursuit, known to be inconsistent with Christian discipleship. It was hard to get loose from the grasp of his arch-enemy. And as he recurs to the severe, and perhaps protracted conflict, he looks upon it as a miracle of divine grace that he has the prospect of heaven. Even his Christian life is a *warfare*, and every step towards the hill of Zion is the result of *conquest*. What then must have been the character of the warfare and the victory, when the strongholds of sin and Satan, in the heart, were first assailed and carried by the Holy Ghost?

To the same effect is the testimony derived from *the experience of the unrenewed*. I might with safety appeal to those who hear me, and leave the question to their decision. Have you not found it hard to take up seriously the subject of preparation for judgment and eternity? Have you ever found the convenient time?—ever been free from embarrassments? Reason and conscience have sustained throughout the claims of the gospel; but have they maintained a ready and decided ascendancy? Have you not found difficulty in checking the common waywardness and folly of youth, and the worldliness of opening manhood, and above all, that fear of man which bringeth a snare? Have you not been sometimes alarmed at your complete captivity to passion or appetite? Can you not recur to hours of deep thought and solemn purpose—hours when, under the action of conscience, and revelation, and possibly the Holy Spirit, you felt that something must be

done effectually and soon to escape merited wo? And why were not those hours, so fruitful in promise, hours of repentance, and pardon, and salvation? What mean those stifled convictions, and broken vows, and cherished hopes of a more convenient season?—what, but that a sinner, the moment he looks seriously at religion as a personal and practical matter, is appalled by an array of difficulty? Trace back your experience on this subject to earliest childhood; and tell us if obstacles have not steadily accumulated, throwing you farther from repentance and hope, and deepening the gloom that has settled upon your prospects. And point us to a single *page* in your history that, of itself, holds out any rational prospect that you will ever be converted and saved.

II. After this varied and concurring proof of our leading proposition, we very naturally inquire, with interest, for the GROUND of all this difficulty. What are the embarrassments so formidable and threatening? Right views on this point are manifestly essential to right notions of human responsibility.

1. Conversion and salvation are not rendered hard, by any serious difficulty in sufficiently understanding the subject of religion.

God has adapted his communication to the intellect of those addressed. The Bible was designed to be a *light* to your feet and a *lamp* to your path. And to question its adaptation to your capacity, is to question both the benevolence and wisdom of God. Indeed it is a *revelation*, only so far as it may be understood. And where is the obscurity? It has indeed its sublime and mysterious truths; but even these are plainly thrown out before the world as *facts*—facts to be cordially admitted, though not fully comprehended. And where do you not find sublimity and mystery even in the material creation, and in the system of divine providence? “Behold,” says God, “I set before you the way of life and the way of death.” And who does not discern the difference? Who need be a stranger to his duty? Who, with the gospel in his hand, can fail to perceive his ruin, and the only method of relief? Who cannot learn the nature of repentance and faith?—the leading terms of pardon? You cannot plead ignorance as an apology for continuing in sin. Conscience says, no. And the Savior and Judge himself declares, “This is the condemnation, that *light* is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.”

The difficulty is not,

2. That God has thrown any embarrassment in the way of conversion. All his arrangements are of the opposite character and tendency. And he has brought into steady action a powerful system of moral influence for counteracting the perverse spirit of man, and restraining his wayward steps, and hedging up his path to ruin. He has given you

conscience for this purpose. He has given you the gospel and the varied religious institutions for this purpose. He has visited you with mercies and judgments for this purpose. And in urging your repentance by such means, he has dealt with you in perfect sincerity and frankness, as well as infinite kindness. The very *suspicion* of God's exerting some mysterious and irresistible influence against your repentance is flagrant injustice to his nature as a God of love, and can be regarded by him only with infinite displeasure.

The difficulty is not,

3. That religion is a matter in which men have no capacity at all to act.

They are subjects of God's moral government; and they have all the powers necessary to a perfect moral agency, and a full accountability. The manner in which they are treated by their Sovereign--the manner in which they are addressed throughout the Bible, is evidence of this. Their very consciousness affords decisive evidence of this. The fact that they do constantly act, though they act wrong, is evidence that they have the *power* of free moral action. You have intelligence, will, and conscience. And such faculties are the foundation of accountability; and while they exist, you can never rid yourself of the obligation to do right. It is your very *nature* to be active beings; and religion has made all its arrangements in perfect harmony with this feature of your character. Even the grace that brings down the loftiness of man, and breaks or melts the heart of stone, and throws into it something of the purity and peace of heaven, never interferes with any thing necessary to a perfect power of free moral action. It can surely *aid* your action, without suspending your activity. It can allay your prejudice and enmity, and kindle in your soul the love of God, and lodge a spirit of devoted loyalty in the heart, without prostrating for a moment one intellectual faculty, or interfering a moment with your responsibility. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

Which leads me to remark,

4. That the difficulty in question lies in the *obstinate depravity of the heart*.

In proof of this our text is directly in point: "There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." Israel was in a fearfully degenerate state. Their repentance was sought with great urgency. They were alternately invited and warned, blessed and scourged. Prophets bewailed their obduracy. Jehovah proclaimed their "neck an iron sinew, and their brow brass." And even themselves perceived, and felt, and frankly confessed their obstinacy. They became fully aware of the great secret of their prolonged apos-

tacy. And they fixed the difficulty of conversion to God just where we have said it lies, in the inveterate depravity of the heart. "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." They felt the justice of God's claims, and the pressure of their obligations. They had resolved, over and over again, to yield to his demand and return to their duty. But they were in bondage to their lusts. They knew and acknowledged it to be a *willing* captivity; and yet it was so complete and firm as to drive them to utter despair. Without a single apology for their sins, they settled down to the gloomy apprehension, that they might never gain the mastery over their corruptions, and exhibit the character of true penitence at the feet of their Sovereign. They uttered not a syllable concerning any want of knowledge; they had not the most distant suspicion of there being any thing in God's arrangements to embarrass their repentance and salvation; they never dreamt of any defect or incompetency as regards the power of moral action. They frankly acknowledged the true ground of difficulty—they *loved strangers*; they had an inveterate aversion to the character, and law, and worship of God.

Here is a plain illustration of the ground on which men, of every age have found it hard to be converted and saved. It has been hard just in proportion to the obstinacy of the will, and the strength of their depravity. They have loved themselves; they have loved the world; and could not part with their idols for God and heaven. The young ruler loved his possessions; and when called to part with them for Christ, *went away grieved*. Agrippa loved the parade of royalty; and could not yield to reason and conscience, though almost persuaded to be a Christian. Felix had his sensual indulgences as well as honors, which he could not relinquish, though convictions of duty and forebodings of wrath pressed upon his mind and urged repentance. The objection with them all lay in the unyielding perverseness of the heart. And it is the precise difficulty every sinner meets when agitating the subject of conversion and eternal life; and the very difficulty under which thousands of awakened sinners adopt the despairing language of Israel, *There is no hope: no*.

The subject furnishes lessons of very plain practical instruction. It shows,

1. The reality and nature of the sinner's dependence in religion.

Israel was in a corrupt and ruined state; and they were led to despair of recovery through their own strength. But not more forlorn was their case than that of a fallen world at large. If ever a sinner is raised from "the horrible pit" to holiness and happiness, it is "not

of man, but of God." The Bible, observation, experience, all proclaim it hard for him to be converted; too hard to admit the hope, that a single soul will ever break from the bondage of sin, and rise to purity and heaven, unless divine power interfere. The solemn reality of your dependence cannot be disguised. It is one of the very plainest truths in religion. If God's arm is not made bare for your relief, you will cleave to your sins, and sink under the curse for ever. No page of the Bible and no record of past piety points to any other source of hope.

But what is *the nature* of the dependence? In the case of Israel, it was occasioned by a perverse heart. "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." In the case of every sinner, it springs from precisely the same cause. There is a stubborn *will* opposed to the authority of the Most High. There is a heart desperately at variance with the character and arrangements and claims of Him who is upon the throne. There is a loftiness that will not stoop so low as to be saved upon the terms of the gospel. You have intelligence enough; you encounter no embarrassments from any mysterious arrangements of God; you have capacity for moral action; but, alas! you are wedded to the world and to sin. "Inclined to evil—and that continually." "You will not come to Christ that you may have life." Mistake not, then, the true nature and ground of your dependence; but think of it, as the Bible contemplates it, originating in a "heart desperately wicked."

The subject shows,

2. The propriety of pressing upon sinners their obligation and responsibility. They are subjects of God's government. The relation involves duties:—duties to be promptly met. We know they have trampled divine authority in the dust. But has their apostacy annihilated their duty? Has their disobedience repealed the statute, and set them loose from all accountability? We know it is hard for them to return. But is the difficulty of a nature to impair at all their obligation? Is it any thing but stubborn rebellion?—a proud reluctance to seek mercy upon gospel terms? Is the conflict between the sinner and God any other than that of mind against mind? And if God be right, is not the creature wrong? And must not the Sovereign hold him responsible for the wrong? Must not the world be frankly told, that all the obligations and responsibilities of subjects of the eternal government rest upon them every hour? Because you find it hard to repent, does God excuse you from the duty? Because you find it hard to confess guilt, and seek pardon at his footstool, does he consent that you prolong the controversy? "God now commandeth all men everywhere to re-

pent." And he bids his ministers echo the command in every dwelling-place of man. And there is woe to him who proclaims license for a single hour's continuance in sin. God is upon the throne, announcing his unchangeable law; and the announcement defines the obligations of every intelligent creature. They must be felt. They must be promptly and cheerfully met. "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life."

3. The subject suggests a serious doubt of the genuineness of his experience who cherishes the idea that religion is an easy matter.

We have found abundant evidence that it is *hard* for men to be converted and saved. This sentiment is sustained by the Bible, by the nature of the gospel provisions, by observation, by the experience of the world, both saints and sinners. Something you may do in religion with but little sacrifice, and little sense of difficulty. But the work will be superficial, and the goodness like the morning cloud and the early dew. The change of character that prepares for heaven is a "great change." Appetite and passion do not yield their supremacy at a single nod. Principles of sin, that have been gathering strength from infancy up to this hour, are not to be displaced by a single word. The human heart never renounces the vain world, and rises to God, and puts on the "image of the heavenly," by any common effort. No; the great change is of God; and it is purposely wrought in such a manner as to teach the creature his utter ruin, and to draw from his humbled spirit a gushing tide of gratitude to Heaven.

Have you the hope that you have passed from death unto life? If it be genuine, you have found religion pleasant indeed; but you know, too, that you have encountered difficulty. You can perhaps recur to a period when, with all your anxieties and doings to gain eternal life, you felt that you were steadily receding from hope and heaven—"nothing bettered, but rather growing worse." You can perhaps remember, that, in view of the deformity and obduracy of the heart, you sunk down in utter despair of relief from yourself, from friends, from the world, and rested your last hope only on the grace and power of the Holy One. Is there something like this in your experience? It accords with the experience of others, and among them some whose religious influence has been felt by thousands, by millions. Look at the case of Paul, of the jailer, and every Scripture example of conversion in which the first awakened feelings are described. Read the Conversion of Edwards, of Bunyan, of Brainerd, of Payson, of Mills, of Eleanor Emerson, and others who shine as stars in the firmament. These all speak a language much less flattering to human

pride and false security, than that it is an *easy matter* to be converted and saved. They say with David—and the sentiment is reiterated by millions in both worlds—"He brought me up also out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise to the living God."

Finally; our subject solemnly urges sinners at once to make God their refuge and help.

Perhaps you have often felt the necessity of something being done more effectually for your salvation. You have been aware that your spirit and that of God were not in harmony. After all you have done, you have seen the necessity of some better training, as a preparation to mingle with the saved in heaven. You have perhaps cherished anxiety, and tried to repent, and tried to embrace Christ, and struggled to rise from the miry clay to a standing on the rock, and sought the aid of others, supposed to be acquainted with true piety, and to have power at the altar of mercy. And, possibly, after all, you are sensible of having labored without effect. And you have stopped and stood just where Israel stood, when pouring out the piteous lament, "There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go."

Derive from your experience, then, a lesson of instruction. Cease from the vain dependence upon yourself, upon your fellow-men. Cherish the impression of your lost condition, your utter unworthiness; and now look to the everlasting God, with the spirit of the publican in the temple, the leper at the feet of Jesus, the prodigal returning home, the thief on the cross, and Peter crying from the waves, Lord save me. God has the ability to save. He delighteth not in the death of the wicked. Judgment is his strange work. His very nature is love. He can rend the veil that hides his glory from your eye; and dislodge the power of sin and Satan in your heart; and give you spiritual liberty, and life, and joy. Make him your refuge. Look to him as your only help. Say that you are guilty—say that you are lost. And let the conviction be lodged deep and immoveable in your heart, that you must be saved only through infinite grace in Christ Jesus.

Come from the four winds, *O Breath*, breathe upon the slain that they may live. Be thine the victory, and thine the glory. *Amen.*

SERMON CLXXII.

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CHRIST DIED FOR MAN.

ROMANS V. 6. *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*

THIS text brings to view the leading truth of the New Testament. *Christ died for sinners.* When men were "without strength," that is, when they were sinful, wicked, ungodly, Christ died for them. It is the leading truth of the gospel, because it is that with which every other truth in the scheme of salvation is connected, and on which the whole scheme itself depends. The gospel proposes a plan for saving sinners. In that plan, the atoning death of Christ is the pre-eminent part. It is the GREAT FACT of the gospel. *Jesus Christ died for sinful men.*

Let us, my brethren, for a moment, look at this fact. Christ died for man—not for fallen angels. There are in the universe of God other beings, besides mankind, who are sinners. But the Savior's death was not intended to benefit them. They, saith the Scripture, "are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." It is not with them a time of trial. They have not now a day of probation. Whatever might have been the conditions on which they, before they fell, occupied their heavenly seats, it is plain that no terms are now proposed to them for regaining those seats. The Savior did not die for their offences, nor was he raised again for their justification. His sufferings were endured for man, not for fallen angels—for those who have a day of probation, not for those whose doom is sealed—for prisoners of hope, not for prisoners of despair.

The Savior's death regarded man, also, in distinction from all holy beings. The angels of light and all other beings who have maintained their allegiance to God, have no need of a Redeemer's interposition on their behalf. And although from various parts of the word of God we learn that these holy beings cherish a deep concern for the affairs of men, and on this account, no doubt, looked with intense interest on Jesus' dying agonies, yet they could not feel that what they witnessed was necessary to their own enjoyment. They were happy without it, in the full enjoyment of God's favor.

But again—the Savior's death regarded man himself, not merely as an intelligent being capable of high attainments in knowledge and happiness, and of an exalted destiny; for other intelligent beings of as high

capacity as man derive no personal benefit from his redeeming work. Angels, both holy and fallen, have intelligent natures, are moral agents, and as capable of whatever is painful and wretched, and of whatever is desirable and felicitous, as man. But the death of Christ had respect to man *as a sinner*. It was only as a sinner that he needed a Savior. It was only as a guilty wretch, who had broken his allegiance to God, and had become a rebel against his rightful Sovereign, that man stood in need of One to make reconciliation between him and his offended Governor. Had man remained true to his duty and his God—had he continued to wear his original garb of innocence—had he never cast off the fear of God, and erased the divine image from his soul—had he not plunged into the pollution of sin and become abased and corrupted in the sight of Heaven, the Savior's atoning and restoring work would never have been undertaken.

Yes, it was for the benefit of man as a sinner, that Jesus Christ descended from heaven to earth, and expired on the cross. He gave himself up to indignity, suffering, and death for man, *because man was sinful*, because he had offended God, because he was exposed to all the horrors of eternal death, and could not otherwise be delivered. Jesus submitted to these sufferings to make man happy—to prepare a way for his restoration to the image and favor of God—to render it possible that the prodigal might return to his Father's house—to open heaven's doors, so that the lost wanderer might come in. Think of it, my hearers; think long and intensely upon it, that Jesus endured the revilings of a wicked world, the hidings of his Father's countenance, the bitter anguish of the garden, and the torturing agonies of the cross, that sinful man might be saved—that the guilty rebel, who deserved a place in the prison-house of eternal despair, might have a place in heaven, and a harp of gold, and a crown of glory. Was ever love like this? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus so loved sinful men that he died for them. "*O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.*"

This simple and obvious train of thought lays a foundation for several very important reflections.

1. *The immense value of the human soul.* In no other way does this appear so strikingly as by contemplating the price paid for its redemption. We can, indeed, obtain an exalted conception of the worth of the human soul, by considering its nature—by looking at its capacities for intelligence and enjoyment—by contemplating its capability of exploring the vast fields of knowledge, the works of creation and redemption, and by reflecting on its adaptedness to increase in knowledge and felicity during eternal ages. In this way it is easy to understand, that the

soul of the lowest of the human race is capable of rising, in the long and distant periods of eternity, vastly higher than the present elevation of angelic natures, and of enjoying more happiness than all created beings have yet enjoyed, since time began. But when I inquire the value of the human soul, tell me not of its capabilities—tell me not of the intellect of Newton, which could trace the march of planets and systems, and explore the handiwork of God—point me not to the extatic joys of Payson, who, “swimming in a sea of glory,” began to warble seraphic songs on earth. Nor tell me even of the songs and allaluias of heaven where the redeemed see as they are seen, and know as they are known. All this is interesting, intensely interesting. But I learn the value of the human soul from another Teacher. I have the mind of God on the subject. He shows me that it is worth the sacrifice of his well-beloved Son. I look to the cross. There I learn what estimate God puts on the human soul. There I see the price paid for its redemption. This view supersedes immeasurably all other computations of its value.

2. *God has done more for sinful men than he has done for angels.* Without doubt the greatest gift of God to created beings is the gift of his Son. This is “his unspeakable gift,” and immeasurably exceeds all others in value. But this gift was made to man—to man as a sinner. Not simply to man as a creature capable of happiness, but as a transgressor deserving only misery. This gift was not made to angels. The holy angels could not receive it. They did not need pardon by the blood of Christ. And though God has given them all that is necessary for their complete and eternal felicity, though he may have given them capacities for intelligence and enjoyment of a higher order than he has bestowed on man; yet he has not imparted to them his greatest gift. This came down to sinful man.

O ungrateful men, look at this fact and wonder! Look at it and be filled with admiration of the exceeding riches of the divine goodness. Why should God bestow his greatest gift on the least deserving? Why should he make the most valuable benefaction that ever Heaven granted, to such as deserved his wrath—to poor, degraded, sinful man? This will afford matter of astonishment and gratitude for ever. Eternity will not be long enough to exhaust this theme of praise.

Just look at it, my hearers, a little more in detail. See that poor man, scarcely known among the busy multitudes of earth. Very few here notice him. His death would scarcely leave a blank, except at his own fireside, and in the place where, with others, he offers up prayer to God; and when he dies his fellow-men will hardly remember that he ever lived. Yet God notices that poor man. He gave his only begotten Son to die for him—a greater gift than ever he bestowed on the highest angel of glory.

Look again at that vile and loathsome profligate—a wicked wretch, who utterly casts off the fear of God, and sets his mouth against the heavens. He spurns the restraints, not only of religion, but of morality. He profanes the name of his Maker, tramples on every rule of virtue, and wallows in all the mire and filth of depravity. He is a disgusting nuisance among men. Yet that miserable man has an immortal soul. He has a capacity for whatever is great and good, and high and holy. He might be saved if he would repent and turn to God, and have his polluted soul washed in redeeming blood. But if he perish in his iniquity, as in all probability he will, yet God gave his Son to die for such men. Yes, God has given to the chief of sinners a richer gift than ever he bestowed on Gabriel.

3. *Redeemed saints in heaven have greater cause for gratitude than even the angels.* The simple reason is, that they have received the richest gift. In their songs there will be certain enrapturing strains which angels can never adopt. All the inhabitants of that blessed world may sing—"Worthy is the Lamb." But angels cannot add, as redeemed sinners will, "for he was slain for us." It was for sinners alone that Jesus died; and those of them who, through his redemption, shall be brought home to glory, will raise the most grateful notes heard in heaven, in praise to Him as their Deliverer.

One peculiar source of the happiness of the redeemed in heaven will be the contrast between their present and former condition. Once they were living on earth amidst all the temptations and dangers of a sinful world;—now they are in heaven. Once they were sinners, covered with moral defilement, vile in the sight of heaven and vile in their own sight;—now they are holy, no stain of pollution or guilt cleaves to them; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Once they were in a state of danger—they feared much that they should be lost for ever—they trembled and wept lest they should never be permitted to enter the gate of the New Jerusalem—they had, many times, awful apprehensions that they should be cast down, as they deserved, to hell. But now they are safe—their feet stand on Mount Zion—they have put on robes of perfect righteousness and crowns of unfading glory. Their fears and tremblings are all over. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them by living fountains, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." This contrast in their situation—this comparison of what it now is with what it once was, must, of course, contribute a large share to the overflowing fulness of their felicity. But angels, except by sympathy, cannot partake of this. They were never exposed to the snares of a sinful world. They were never sinners—were never afraid that they might fail of obtaining a place in heaven.

Heaven was always their habitation, and they did not gain it by tears and prayers, through the blood of the Savior. I do not say that angels are less happy than redeemed saints in heaven. All in that world are doubtless as happy as their capacities admit of. But those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and have escaped the pollution of the world, have on this account a distinct and peculiar source of happiness. And they will feel it and rejoice in it for ever. They will feel that they have greater cause for gratitude than even angels have; and this will tune their voices and their harps, while they sing "the new song which none can learn, but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from among men—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

4. *They who sink to hell from Christian lands, will have a source of misery which even devils do not have.* It is not said that they will be more miserable than the fallen angels; for concerning this we have no adequate means of knowing. But that they will have some occasion of misery, some stings of conscience, some sources of regret and self-condemnation which devils do not have, is perfectly evident. They will remember that a Savior died for men, and that they might have had redemption through his blood. They will remember that they once had a day of probation, and the invitations of mercy. They will remember that they were forewarned of their doom, and urged to repent and lay up their treasure in heaven. And they will remember too that they neglected the great salvation, and brought all this wretchedness on themselves. Their reflections will go back to the time when, seated in the Christian congregation, Jesus Christ was evidently set forth crucified among them, and they were affectionately invited to become his followers and be happy—to look to his cross, and live.

But such offers of salvation were never made to fallen angels, and they cannot, of course, reproach themselves for having rejected them. No Savior died for them; nor have they, since they became sinners, had any offers of mercy and pardon. And though they may be filled with remorse at the recollection of their rebellion and apostacy; though their very existence may be rendered a curse by their raging passions and their enmity against God; though, when they look towards the seats of glory, which they might still have occupied, if they had remained firm in their allegiance to Him that sitteth on the throne, they may groan in unutterable anguish and dreadful despair; yet they can never reproach themselves with having trampled on a Savior's blood—their eternity will not be filled up with the self-condemning reflection, that they had an opportunity to regain the happy seats they had lost, but neglected it. Though they will be miserable and justly miserable for

their wickedness, yet it will not be a part of their misery that they turned away from the cross and rejected an atoning Savior.

This peculiar source of misery will be the portion of impenitent men. They alone will be tormented day and night with the remembrance, that once they had the offers of mercy through a Redeemer—once they might have obtained pardon and eternal life, if they would have complied with the gospel terms of salvation. And this reflection will be the keenest sting in the world of wo. Self-condemnation for having alighted the offers of pardon through a Redeemer will constitute the bitterest ingredient in the cup of misery.

Think of the reflections of the lost sinner as he casts his eye towards the heavenly mansions. He may say—‘I might have occupied a seat in that happy world, if I had not neglected the great salvation. I might have been among them there, in those mansions of light and blessedness—I might have had a harp of gold and a crown of glory—I might have sung the song of Moses and the Lamb, and raised as high a note of joy as any of the redeemed, if I had not turned away from the cross of Christ and refused to deny myself and follow him. Oh, I might have been happy if I had not rejected offered mercy.—But now, alas! I am in the prison of despair. Now I have no offers of mercy; no voice of salvation reaches my ear. Here I must dwell for ever, and reproach myself with my own undoing, and gnaw my tongue for pain. And what adds intensely to my anguish is, that I am here, not simply because I am a sinner—for other sinners have obtained a place in heaven—but because I would not come to Jesus in an accepted time. I am here—not because I could not have avoided it, not because there was any stern necessity—but because I refused to hear when the Savior called; because I would not regard him when he stretched out his hand and beckoned me to come up to his kingdom and partake of his glory. Wretch that I am; I am my own eternal destroyer!’

And now, say, has not this wretched outcast a source of misery which devils do not have? May not they reproach him with a kind of guilt which does not belong to them? And will not the remembrance that a Savior has died for sinners, and that he refused to embrace him, be the keenest and most tormenting sting in the gnawings of the undying worm?

My dear hearers, will any of you be that miserable man? O do not, I beseech you. Go not into eternity to lament that you lived in a land enlightened by the gospel, and yet did not embrace a Savior. Put not into the cup of your misery the bitterest ingredient in the universe of God. Avoid, I pray you, such self-torture. Avail yourself, at once of the provisions of the gospel. Come to Jesus. Deny yourself, and take up your cross, and follow him. Do this, and be happy. Neglect to do it, and you perish for ever.